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# National, Ethnic and Religious Identities: Hybridity and the case of the Polish Tatars

Anna Cieslik and Maykel Verkuyten

*Questions of hybridity and multiple identities are over-theorised but the number of empirical studies is limited. The present study examines some of the discursive devices used in two Polish Tatar magazines for managing narratives about their national, ethnic and religious identities. The Polish Tatars are a numerically small group that have lived for more than 600 years in Catholic Poland. For them, being a Tatar, Muslim and Pole at the same time, is central to their self-understanding, and they do not want to limit the importance of any of these. Two main strategies of narrative identity management were identified, related to identity definitions and identity connections. The former gives layered understandings about Polish Tatar identity: a factual one in which a local and historical connection is made and a spiritual one in which belonging to an imagined symbolic community is stressed. The latter provides reconciliation between identities by stressing their similarities and relations, by emphasizing the contributions made by Tatars to Polish society, and by presenting the Tatars as potentially being in a unique mediating position between Islam and Christianity. In the near future, Tatars' strategies for creating a hybrid identity might be challenged by global and more local developments.*

*Keywords: Polish Tatars; Hybridity; Multiple Identities; Narrative*

Much of the current theoretical literature claims that globalisation has led to a fragmentation and hybridisation of national, ethnic and cultural identities. Theories of hybridity reject the notion of homogenous, uniformly defined identities and subscribe instead to notions of heterogeneity and multiplicity (e.g. Ang, 2001; Anthias, 2001; Nederveen Pieterse, 1995). The hybrid state accounts for a mixture of

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different, multiple, identities and hybridity is seen as an argument against homogeneity, essentialism and absolutism.

The notion of hybridity entails empirical, theoretical and normative claims (Nederveen Pieterse, 2001). Empirically, it is argued that forms of mixing are historically far from new or recent but that contemporary times show an acceleration of mixing of all kinds. There is a proliferation of cultural, linguistic, artistic, ethnic and racial forms of hybridity. Globalisation has led to the mixing of practices and meanings, and hybridity has become common and continues to increase in all spheres of life.

Theoretically, the recent thematisation of hybridity dates from the 1980s. Originally, hybridity is a nineteenth century word that was used to refer to physiological phenomena and played a prominent role in the racialised formulations about miscegenation and 'racial mixture' of the period (see Young, 1996). Currently, hybridity is predominantly used to describe cultural phenomena and identities. The term refers to the different lifestyles, behaviours, practices and orientations that result in multiple identities. Analytically, the term 'hybridity' is used for analysing phenomena in which elements, meanings and forms are combined, blended and mixed (Werbner, 1997; Young, 1996). Two or more meanings merge into a new mode, and Pidgin and creolised languages constitute clear examples and metaphors of this process. This analytical understanding of hybridity is meaningful in relation to the prior assumption of existing old differences and clear (ethnic, racial or national) categories.

Normatively, hybridity and related terms are used to criticise ethnic boundaries and essentialisms, and to valorise mixture and change. Hybridity is considered transgressive, and is celebrated as an innovative and creative power (Ang, 2001; Bhaba, 1994). Hybridity would constitute a liberating human condition and a political alternative to the exclusionary and racist consequences of social categorisations, such as national, religious and ethnic ones.

The notion of hybridity is important and fashionable. However, points of criticism have also been raised. It has been argued that analyses of hybridity tend to ignore questions of power and inequality, that the term is meaningful only as a critique of essentialism, that hybridity depends on a notion of purity, and that it is an elitist posture promoted by privileged postcolonial and diasporic intellectuals located in the West (e.g. Anthias, 2001; Friedman, 1997; Hutnyk, 1997). Nederveen Pieterse (2001) has responded to most of these criticisms, and others have argued that people in many parts of the world face questions of hybridity and multiple identities (e.g. Ang, 2001; Niranjana, 1992).

However, the theoretical studies on hybridity and related notions greatly outnumber the empirical work. Theories of hybridity emphasize the apparently unlimited sources of identity, such as race, class, religion, gender, nation and so on, but provide few clues as to whether these resources are actually used and how their relationship is negotiated and managed.

The notion of hybridity and the idea that people have multiple identities raises the important question how these identities are negotiated or dealt with. For example, the various identities may interact according to a situational hierarchy where one position becomes the main distinction along which other sources of identity are ranked and periodically subsumed. Furthermore, in relation to migration, Bauböck (1998, p. 43) talks about additive identities and additive assimilation which is 'retaining a previous cultural membership while acquiring a new one'. The notion of additive identities and the idea that multiple identifications can be compatible is increasingly becoming commonplace. However, multiple identities may also imply tensions or conflicts between different understandings and loyalties. Such tensions and conflicts require strategies of accommodation or reconciliation.

What is needed are empirical analyses of multiple and hybrid identities. The number of studies is very limited and existing work tends to focus on youth cultures in urban centres and so-called 'new ethnicities' (e.g. Back, 1995; Hall, 1990). Research in different contexts can assess, however, the normative aspects of different theories and can provide the much-needed empirical material for evaluating the many fashionable theoretical claims about hybridity, intersections and new ethnicities (Modood, 1998). These claims need more investigation and more grounding in empirical analysis of diverse cases. This will allow us to understand the ways that multiple identities are actually managed and negotiated.

The present research focuses on the question of how the categories of ethnicity, religion and nation intersect, and the ways in which their potential contradictions are publicly managed. The focus is on the actual accomplishment and manifestation of these identities. The analytic interest is in the discursive strategies used for explaining and accommodating these multiple senses of belonging and membership. This issue is examined from a particular perspective and among a specific minority group, the Polish Tatars.

The perspective adopted is the idea that identities become manifest in narrative. Various theorists have argued that the predominant way in which identities and self-understandings are given shape is through narrative (e.g. Bhabha, 1990; Hermans & Kempen, 1993; Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner & Cain, 1998). National and ethnic narratives provide accounts of the group's origin, its history and its relationship to others (e.g. Mehan & Robert, 2001; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001; Wertsch, 1997). Identities are seen as continuing stories that individuals and groups construct and tell about themselves and which locate them in society. However, the stories available to tell are not unrestricted. Different groups have different narrative opportunities and face different narrative constraints. Historical, social and political patterns limit and shape the possible group narratives or the available narrative space through which groups can manage and negotiate their multiple identities. Particularly minority groups often face the task of dealing with the tensions and contradictions between their various identities. The possibility of hybridity and multiple identities depends on the ways that identities are narrated.

The present paper focuses on the Polish Tatars which is a numerically small Islamic group living for more than 600 years in Poland, a country where the national identity is closely connected to Roman Catholicism (e.g. Mach, 1993; Zamoyski, 1993). The analysis focuses on the discursive strategies employed by Polish Tatars for reconciling their Tatar, Polish and Muslim identities which are all three central to their self-understanding (Warمیńska, 1997). In order to contextualise the research, a short historical description will be presented first (see Baranowski, 1950; Borawski & Dubiński, 1986, Miśkiewicz, 1990, 1993; Zamoyski, 1993).

### **History of the Polish Tatars**

During the thirteenth century, a small number of Tatars had already come to Poland as prisoners of war. However, their main presence in Poland dates back to the beginning of the fourteenth century. At that time, the first voluntary settlers arrived from the Golden Horde of Genghis Khan. They were the descendants of Mongolian tribes who adopted Islam from the Turkish peoples who conquered them. The Tatars had two vital reasons to settle in the territory of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania. Firstly, they were given land and the right to build mosques in exchange for their military service. Secondly, with the passage of time, the Golden Horde faced internal power struggles, which ended with the disintegration of the empire in the fifteenth century.

The Tatars have fought on the Polish side in many important battles, including the famous struggle with the Teutonic Knights of the Cross in 1410 at Grünwald. The Polish kings employed Tatars as translators and diplomats in mediations with the Crimean khans. The Golden Age for the Polish Tatars was the sixteenth century. They were allowed to build mosques and religious schools, and they had property rights equal to the Polish nobility. These special entitlements were withdrawn in the seventeenth century, which brought about the slow decline of the Tatars in Poland. The reign of Zygmunt III was characterized by religious intolerance and persecution. Problems with payment of the Tatar military units resulted in the Tatar rebellion of 1673. A number of outraged Tatar soldiers joined the Turkish side in the Turkish wars (1667–1676).

Incidents of political disagreement between the Polish authorities and the Tatars, however, were rare. During the period of the Polish partitions, in the eighteenth century, the Tatars participated in the uprisings, resulting in national liberation. Despite the efforts of the Russian authorities, they remained loyal to the Poles. They also served during the two World Wars, and in 1935 the Tatar Knight Legion was established as part of the Polish army.

Under communism, the Tatar ethnic group was not allowed to associate in civil organizations and was treated as an exotic 'tourist' attraction. They were protected by the Polish authorities in trying to enhance relations with Islamic states, such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia. The collapse of the communist regime in 1989 led to a strong ethnic revival among minority groups in Poland. In the 'new' Poland the Tatars are

given all the rights of a minority group, but since the Polish economy is not very stable, they do not receive much financial assistance to protect and promote their culture. For example, the Polish government rejected the request for funding of the celebrations of the 600th anniversary of the Tatars' settlement in Poland (Kosc, 2001).

Over time, the number of Tatars in Poland has decreased considerably, from around 60,000 in the seventeenth century to approximately 30,000 in the nineteenth century, and 5,000–6,000 at present. The Tatars are organized in six religious communities. There are old mosques in small villages in the eastern part of the country, and in 1990 a new mosque was built in Gdańsk. In addition, there are prayer houses in Warsaw and Białystok. Before the collapse of the communist system, the only Tatar organization was the Muslim Religious Association. This association underlines the Tatar cultural features of Polish Islam and distinguishes itself from other more recent Muslim associations in Poland, such as the Association of Muslim Unity. In 1992, and out of a growing concern with the Tatars' distinctive ethnic character, the Association of Polish Tatars was founded. Both the Muslim Religious Association and the Association of Polish Tatars are active in social, religious and cultural life. They publish magazines, arrange exhibitions and organize conferences.

### **The Research**

The research was conducted in the first half of 2001 and involved visits to Tatar communities and villages and informal interviews with Tatars. The field research was important for collecting material but also for understanding how religious and ethnic identities intermingle in everyday life. By visiting the homes of Polish Tatars we could, for example, witness how the Muslim decorative elements merge with the typically Christian symbol of a Christmas tree. We could also observe how the different identities were managed in everyday life, for example, by making a clear distinction between religious and professional life. There are many ways in which people can manage their multiple sense of belonging, depending on, for example, local circumstances, economic and material resources, and social networks. Furthermore, being a Polish Tatar appeared to be a more 'problematic' or accountable issue in public than in private life. Hybridity in any real sense implies that one is able to claim and narrate desirable images and self-understandings in a variety of contexts and especially in public spaces.

These experiences and observations were an incentive to investigate how different identities intersect at the level of public discourse. In the present paper, we are interested in the discursive strategies used for publicly managing multiple identities. Furthermore, we wanted to have a systematic corpus of material that, in principle, is also accessible for other researchers, and therefore we decided to focus on written media sources. An additional reason for this is that the media is a powerful ideological institution that affects identities. Hence, the present analysis is based on an examination of articles in two Tatar cultural magazines. So we did not examine,

for example, the ways that people account for their Polish Tatar identity in conversations or in the context of a personal interview. The focus was on the textual, public management of multiple identities. The magazines offer an accessible and systematic source for studying this.

Both magazines are published by the Tatar community in Poland. First, *The World of Islam* (WI) is published by a team of people in the small town of Sokolka (Eastern Poland). They cooperate with academic specialists from the field and Muslim students from the Arabic states. Second, *The Tatar Life* (TL) is published by a branch of the Association of Polish Tatars in cooperation with Tatar cultural centres in Białystok, Gdańsk and Warsaw. Both magazines are mostly self-funded, but some issues of *The World of Islam* are sponsored by different institutions, such as local industries, cultural institutions of the Polish government, and Islamic organizations.

The number of copies of each magazine is about one thousand per edition. The magazines are read predominantly by the Tatar community but are also meant and available for 'outsiders'. Issues of both magazines are published at irregular intervals and distributed mostly through the Tatar community network. The present analysis is based on 27 issues published between 1988 and 2001. Hence, the focus is on the period after the collapse of communism when Polish minorities started to reassert and revive their cultures, traditions, and identities (Laun, 1999). Due to limited availability, the sample analysed does not include all of the issues within that time-span. The magazines were collected through personal contacts with members of the Tatar community. During a field trip to the eastern region of Poland, interviews were conducted with prominent members of that community. Among the people talked to were the editors of the magazines. Some of the magazines collected were purchased directly from them, and some were gifts from other Tatar informants.

The analysis proceeded by first building up a data file of all the articles related to either Polish, Tatar or Muslim identities. The articles were analysed in terms of identifying the main characteristics of the narratives and these will be described first. Subsequently, analytical attention was focused on the devices that were being used to reconcile these identities or make them compatible.

## Narratives

In the magazines, there are two distinguishable and major narratives about the Tatars: one relates to the Oriental background of the Tatars, and the other to their presence in and connection with Poland.

### *The Oriental story*

The articles on the Oriental narrative deal with the history and religious background of the Tatars. Both are presented as central elements of Tatar identity.

First, the Oriental story refers to the idea that the Tatars are Mongolian descendants who once lived under Genghis Khan in their first motherland, the

steppe. There are several articles on the Mongolian ancestry of the Tatars and their mythical leader. According to historical accounts, the Mongolians arrived in the European territories in the thirteenth century. In both magazines, the time of the conquests made by the Mongolian Empire is presented as the glorious past of the Tatar warriors riding from their mythical homeland. The Tatar ancestors are presented as warriors and people living on the wild steppe. Their forefathers are depicted as being courageous, powerful and full of dignity. This image has been carried with them through the centuries and is used to describe the identity of the present-day Tatars. Here is an example of the way that the Tatars describe themselves:

We are brothers, we derive from common roots – the steppe Tatars; our tradition passed from generation to generation, creates our inner unity. (*WI* 3/84 p. 5)

The second important part of the Oriental story is Islam. In many articles, aspects of Islam are discussed and described in various ways, connecting the Tatars with different communities. For example, Islam is the religion of the ancestors and presented as a source of solidarity with Tatar past. Furthermore, the fact that Islam has survived in a Catholic environment would bear witness to the strength of this religion. The following excerpt exemplifies this very well.

[Tatar survival in a Catholic country] proves: a great attachment of this community to Islam and an enormous moral power of this religion. It proves a great attachment to traditions and teachings received from their ancestors. (*WI*, 4/94, p. 12)

In some of the articles, Islam is also discussed as linking the Tatars with Muslims all over the world. Thanks to Islam, the Tatars can see themselves as part of the large community of the Muslim 'umma'. There are many short articles with 'news' on the situation of Muslims around the world. For example, there are short pieces of information about Muslim communities in Germany, France, Sudan or Israel. These articles contain figures and other data about, for example, the number of Muslims in a given country and recent developments in education or the building of new mosques. However, the 'news' articles lack mention of sources and details about the data presented.

In addition, there are various articles in which a description is given of Islamic states around the world. They include personal accounts of trips, for example, to Iran (e.g. *WI*, 7/99). Others are written by citizens of Islamic countries, presumably studying in Poland: such as an article on Albania by Tahira (e.g. *WI* 3/97). Further, there are informative pieces on, for example, the United Arab Emirates (e.g. *WI* 6/95). These articles describe the history of the Islamic countries, their climate, religious practices, architecture, living conditions, and particularly Arabic culture, music and scientific achievements. The descriptions resemble those commonly found in a tourist guide. The places are presented as beautiful and people inhabiting them are depicted as honest and friendly. The significance of these articles seems to be to



describe for the Polish Tatars the charm, beauty, mystery and achievements of the Arab and Islamic world, and to evoke pride in it.

The oriental story with its emphasis on Tatar origin and Islam also plays a role in the present-day survival of the Tatar group in Poland. In the magazines, there are multiple calls for ethnic awareness, and group survival is a predominant theme in various articles. For the Polish Tatars, their potential gradual disappearance has become a major concern. An editorial of one of the Issues of *The World of Islam* reads:

We have to admit that the situation has reached a critical point. After the organizational and democratic changes in Europe there comes a turning period when our fate is being weighted. To be or not to be! What our fate is going to be like depends on ourselves. No one is going to give it to us. (*WI*, 4/94 p. 3)

One discursive way to counter this threat is by describing the reality and vitality of the Tatar community. In most of the issues of the two magazines, there is a section with lengthy and detailed descriptions of local Tatar parishes and settlements. Typically, these articles draw a picture of a village, account for the size of the local Tatar community or reflect upon the architecture of the mosque and the mizar (cemetery). In the magazines, the smallest places inhabited by Tatars, such as Dowcibuszki, Slonim or Smilowicze, are mentioned and described in terms of their inhabitants and development through the centuries (e.g., *WI*, 2/ 1996 p. 9; *WI*, 2/ 1997 p. 18; *TL*, 4/2001 p. 25, and many others). Furthermore, there are many articles on local events, such as births and marriages within the community, as well as descriptions of trips of Tatar youth, gatherings to celebrate holidays, and meetings where the past and future of the Tatars are discussed. These detailed descriptions seem to show or 'prove' the liveliness and uniqueness of the local Tatar communities in the context of an increasingly open society.

### *The Polish story*

One fifth of all the articles examined present historical accounts of the Tatars in Poland. These articles describe events and situations after the Tatar settlement in Poland. The most frequent are the biographies of important figures from the past (war heroes, writers, political leaders, etc.), and Tatar involvement in the struggle for Polish independence. (e.g., *TL*, 4/2001; *TL*, 2/1999; *WI*, 2/1997). The Tatars' Polish patriotism is illustrated by their participation in many battles and their heroic reputation as warriors. The fact that Tatars did fight and gave their life for Poland is presented as decisive proof of their true Polishness.

Within the framework of this Polish narrative, Poland becomes the new motherland, or, as it is often referred to, the adopted motherland. The Tatars are presented as the peaceful peasants and loyal servants, but also as courageous warriors acting for the good of the country. Polish territory and landscape have become theirs. The territory has great significance as Tatar ancestors are buried in Polish soil. A passage

from the editorial to a January 1992 issue of *The Tatar Life* summarizes the Tatar connection and attachment to Poland:

Among the basic aims of the magazine is . . . the memorizing and continuation of the fate of our Muslim ancestors. The majestic Rzeczpospolita (Poland) embraced them in her womb, gave them grounds and noble titles, provided them with freedom of worship and full civil liberties

Hence, the Polish narrative portrays the Tatars as adopted sons of Poland. Poland is depicted as an idealized country of freedom and well-being, despite the pogroms against and persecution of Tatars in the past, and the fact that in the seventeenth century the Tatars joined a borderland rebellion against the Polish monarch. Ties with Poland are presented as deep and sincere because of the Tatars' presence in Poland for many generations. Polishness is seen as an indissoluble and chosen feature of their identity. It is not imposed by anyone and the fact of being *Polish* Tatars is stressed as distinguishing them from Tatars elsewhere.

### **The Management of Multiple Identities**

The Oriental narrative emphasises the connection and loyalty to the past and present. This includes Tatar ancestry in the Mongolian tribes and Muslims around the world. This story reflects the initial 'wild' past of the Tatars. They were a tribe bound together by blood and religious ties. This belief in the tribal connection is an important element of present-day Tatar identity. It implies their separateness from the Poles and expresses the desire for freedom from externally imposed rule. The Tatars present themselves as an Islamic group with an Oriental heritage that is close to Arabic culture and science.

The Polish narrative, on the other hand, focuses on the connection and loyalty to Poland as the adopted motherland. This aspect of their identity calls for solidarity with the Polish people and the cherishing of their Polish cultural heritage. It emphasizes the Tatar obedience, discipline and loyalty to the former Polish monarchy and their commitment to the present Polish Catholic nation. According to the Tatars, there is no inconsistency in being Tatar and Muslim as well as Pole simultaneously.

The question is how are these elements of Tatar identity combined or reconciled in the two magazines? In the different articles, we identified discursive strategies that relate to identity definitions and strategies that emphasise identity connections. Through defining identities in different ways a conceptual space is created in which the three narratives can co-exist. A focus on connections, in turn, brings the elements together by mutual diffusion or by stressing the similarities.

#### *Identity definitions*

There are clear differences in the ways that the narratives are presented in the magazines. In general, the Oriental story has a mythical and symbolic form whereas

the Polish story is historical and factual. This difference makes the two stories conceptually distinct and as functioning on different levels, making it possible to coexist. This differentiation is achieved by the use of particular discursive devices.

Firstly, most of the articles on the Polish narrative are written in a historical-factual way and cover events from the fourteenth century to the 1950s. In the articles, reality is constructed and 'facts' are presented in such a way that evaluations and interpretations become features of the historical world rather than personal opinions of the authors. Several devices are used in making the stories factual (see Potter, 1996). For example, the articles are often written by specialists in the field, such as historians and social scientists. Further, the articles contain many references to primary and secondary sources. In addition, the articles contain vivid and detailed descriptions with concrete examples. Examples with all kinds of details about time of day, place, circumstances and actual behaviour are provided, suggesting a careful recording of the events. These stories are used to illustrate and substantiate the argumentation. Old photographs are also used to document and visualize the writing. The descriptions and visual material make a specific historical claim literal, solid and factual, and present it as something that has really existed independently of the writers' own concern and views.

In contrast to the historical nature of the Polish narrative, the oriental one is mythologized. The main device used in telling the oriental narrative is symbolism (Verkuyten, 1995). Symbolism can be found in the poetic metaphors and images used in the articles and in their layout and use of images. Many issues of the magazines contain poetic pieces written by either contemporary authors or authors from previous centuries. In them, the prevalent message is nostalgia for the Eastern world, its beauty and mystery, or the glorious past of Tatar warriors. The exoticism of the Middle East is often an inspiration for Tatar poetry. The vivid symbolism of the east, the images of tall minarets or of the rising sun, is reflected in Tatar poems. Similarly, oriental motifs, like Tatar warriors on horseback in the steppe, beautiful girls with black eyes and black hair, are also poeticised in lyrics.

There was time when the force of the Golden Horde  
Had all power over Russia  
And to the kneeling Russian princes  
dictated the laws. (Józef Kwaśniewicz, *WI*, 2/1997)

Typically, these poems lack temporal and spatial specification. The myth or legend of the Golden Horde is presented without asking critical questions or providing evidence. It is meant to provide a symbolic understanding of Tatar history and identity. It presents this history and identity in a condensed and vivid way, permitting people to experience and actually feel their spiritual connection with it: something which would be more difficult by the conventional use of words and the factual description of events.

In addition, the oriental character of the story is made obvious in the layout of some of the issues of the magazines. For example, several covers of *The World of Islam*

have images of mosques from all over the world. In it, the colourful marble minarets from other countries intermingle with simple wooden Polish and Lithuanian mosques. The palm trees and turquoise skies of the Middle East are complemented by the oak trees and grey horizons of Eastern Europe. These images present a clear religious link between the Polish Tatars and the Islamic states. It is the unity in faith that brings together the Polish Tatars and their Muslim brothers abroad. This is the most obvious reading of the images. What also seems to be the case is that the contrasting characteristics between the 'here' and the 'there', the richness versus modesty, the abundance versus simplicity, increases the distance between the reality of Poland and the fairy-tale qualities of the Orient.

Furthermore, in some subtitles and quotations in the articles, Arabic script from the Koran is used. The Tatars lost their native language in the seventeenth century, when they started speaking Polish or Belarusian vernacular. Less than 1 per cent of them can actually understand Arabic. Yet, the connection to the language of the Koran seems to play an important role in representing their community. Because most Polish Tatars cannot read the Arabic quotations from the Koran, a Polish translation always has to be provided. Thus, there is a contrast between the known and the unknown. Polish is understandable and clear, Arabic is beautifully mysterious. The fairytale-like quality of mystery is accorded to the Oriental myth.

The result of the ways in which the narratives are told is that they are presented at different levels of 'reality', so that the potential contradictions between them are avoided. The Tatars can see themselves as Polish and Oriental at the same time. The former refers to historical reality, whereas the latter is the symbolic expression of the spiritual nature of the Tatars. On the one hand, there is the factual story about the Tatars being Polish heroes who participated in many Polish wars, and the detailed accounts and photographs prove this. On the other hand, the Tatars are presented as having a spiritual connection to the Oriental and Muslim world and the beauty of minarets is an expression of this. The stories provide different understandings about Polish Tatars that do not contradict. They can exist side by side in the discursive space in which Polish Tatar identity is defined.

### *Connections and similarities*

For the Tatars, Islam not only has a symbolic meaning, but is also central to their everyday life. Islam, as practiced by the Polish Tatars, is the main characteristic distinguishing them from the Catholic Poles. The Tatars perceive themselves as real Muslims, although a special and local variable character to Islam has developed. Furthermore, the social and cultural aspects of their religious life are central for maintaining Tatar ethnic solidarity. In contrast, some 95 per cent of the Polish population is Roman Catholic and Catholicism remains a central aspect of contemporary life and culture in Poland. Catholicism is closely connected with the idea of the Polish nation and 'being Polish' (Mach, 1993; Zamoyski, 1993). Hence, the

Tatars' claim to Polishness can be problematic when their religious background is emphasized too much.

It is difficult to find the right balance between being Polish and Muslim at the same time. There is a potential conflict between the two aspects, as is illustrated in the two Tatar magazines. For example, one of the readers of *The World of Islam* complains: 'I am Polish, but I try to practice Islam as well as I can, so I wear a headscarf' (WI, 1/95, p. 11). The use of the preposition 'but' indicates that the woman herself perceives a difference between the idea of being Polish and being a Muslim. Similarly, another person complains about the fact that many of the participants at the Tatar annual meeting were not Muslims. She writes: 'Most of the participants were Catholics—which seems to be a paradox!' (WI, 2/94, p. 6). To her, the fact that some Tatars are Catholics seems contradictory to Tatar identity. There is, therefore, a potential tension between the identities of Islamic Tatar and the Catholic Pole. The question is how these two identities can be accommodated or reconciled.

One of the ways in which the two are brought together in the magazines is by emphasizing religious similarities rather than differences. For example, it can be emphasized that both religions are monotheistic and that religious commitment is centrally important for both Tatars and Poles. In the magazines, Islam and Christianity are often presented as resembling each other closely. The Islamic values correspond with the Catholic ones and the religious commitment is presented as a clear common feature. Here is an example from *The World of Islam*:

The holy book of Koran commands its believers to absolute honesty, loyalty to oaths, moral purity and abstinence from alcohol. . . . Islam, as a monotheistic religion, has many features in common with Christianity. . . . The Polish Tatars were, as a result of their origin and religion, isolated from the rest of society. As such, they have acquired and retained the most noble features of the "Polish knights." (WI, 3/96, p. 7)

In the magazines, there are also elaborate essays on the Christian-Muslim dialogue in Poland (e.g. WI, 5/94, 5/95, 11/00, 2/01). These are well-written articles, topically related to ecumenism and the mutual understanding of religions. Also, an active member of the Tatar community was very enthusiastically explaining to us about ecumenical masses in Białystok, where both a Catholic priest and an imam read fragments of the Bible. The Old Testament, as a book common to Muslims and Catholics, represented the link between the two communities.

Another way in which in the magazines the Muslim and Polish aspects of Tatar identity are accommodated is by stressing the contribution that Islamic religion and culture has made to Polish culture. The Tatars' interpretation of history stresses that Tatar culture and religion have never been restricted or suppressed. Rather, Tatar culture and religion would not only have been accepted by the Poles but would also have enriched Polish culture. An example is the appropriation of Arabic language. Several issues of *The World of Islam* focus on the contributions of Arabic to the Polish language. In these issues there is a section on vocabulary. These sections contain lists

of Polish words arranged alphabetically with their definitions and country of origin. Some examples of Arabic and Turkish words that have enriched Polish language are:

- *filizanka*: tea cup, (Turkey)
- *fhalka*: lady's underwear (Turkey)
- *haracz*: illegal tax (Arab)
- (WI, 6–7/94, p. 11)

The words enumerated in each issue of *The World of Islam* function in everyday Polish language. Their presence in the language would document the Tatar presence in Poland. It would show that Tatar culture has made a significant contribution to the Polish language and culture. However, most of the Arabic and Turkish vocabulary used in Poland was actually imported from Western Europe, where the achievements of Arabic civilization were more widely known.

A third strategy of integration is the idea that the Tatars have a unique role in linking Poland and countries of the East, or Christianity and Islam. This idea gives the religious background of the Tatars a particular and positive significance. Tatars have for a long time claimed the position of an intermediary or negotiator between Christian Poland and the Islamic World. Historically, the Tatars did indeed play a role in relations between Poland and the Mongolian and Turkish empires. They acted as translators, guides, negotiators, messengers and informants in the service of the Polish kings. With the passage of time, the significance of this role dwindled. The Turkish Empire ceased to exist and the Tatar population in Poland decreased.

The end of World War I brought about a revival of small groups of nationalists. Between 1918 and 1939, the messianic ideology of the Polish Tatars was often articulated. At that time, one of the Tatar activists, Olgierd Kryczyński (1932), wrote:

In the great ideological movement, which is looking for the synthesis of the East and the West, the Lithuanian Tatars are called upon to play a role. The Tatar community is somehow a miniature of that synthesis. The aim is to create a new civilization, which will initiate a new era in human history.

Leaders of the Tatar community believed that the Tatar Islamic tradition, combined with its successful adaptation to Polish culture, would give them a unique position and background for linking the East and the West. This mission was stated in print in the 1930s by another Tatar intellectual, Leon Kryczyński:

The Tartar settlement in Lithuania did not cause their total separation from the Muslim world, connected to them through descent and religion. . . . Our Polish diplomacy is aiming to bring Poland and the world of Islam closer together. . . . It should be stressed that the idea of turning to Polish Muslims to make contacts with the Muslim countries has been accepted by our diplomacy. It is right and deserves all appreciation. (in Chazbijewicz, 1989)

Kryczyński's optimism was justified only to a certain extent. The outbreak of World War II and the rise of communism did nothing for the development of ethnic

awareness. However and as indicated earlier, in order to facilitate relations with countries such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia, the communist authorities wanted to maintain a Muslim element in Poland. Politicians from those countries were invited to Eastern Poland to visit mosques and settlements of the Polish Tatars, seemingly flourishing under communist rule. Thus, apparently the Tatars did play some role, but predominantly as puppets in the service of the communist authorities.

The idea of the Tatars representing a link between Poland and countries of the East has recently become alive again. Examination of the current magazines shows that it is brought repeatedly to the fore. However, the focus of attention has shifted from the political or diplomatic role of the Tatars to their role in religious reconciliation. The opposition is no longer stated in terms of states from the Middle East versus Western states, but rather as Islam versus Christianity. In the editorial to *The World of Islam* (2/94), one of the purposes of the magazine is defined as follows:

We hope that our magazine will contribute to better mutual understanding; to a deepening of friendship between the world of Islam and the world of Christianity.  
(*WI*, 2/94)

The magazine emphasises the possibility of reconciling Christianity and Islam. The Tatar survival in Poland would illustrate that Muslims and Christians can live together. The Tatars would present the prime example of the possibility and viability of a multiple identity. It is claimed that their ethos of 'having a role as mediators' can turn their connection and spiritual belonging to the world of Islam from a disadvantage to an advantage. The fact that they are Muslims living for centuries in their adopted Christian motherland is presented as a favourable characteristic that potentially can be utilised in service of Poland as well as for the present-day problems between the Orient and the Occident. In that way, both their Polish and Muslim identities are affirmed and neither of them is denied. They can coexist, since they are made to be complementary and useful to each other. Thus in the magazines, the Tatars confirm their spiritual link with Islam, their eastern heritage, but they try to present it as an asset that can make them even better servants of Poland their adopted motherland, and, perhaps, of the world at large.

## Discussion

Questions of hybridity and multiple identities are over-theorised and understudied. Hybridity has become something of a catchword, but the number of empirical studies are limited. Furthermore, theories of multiple identities emphasise the many sources of identity but largely tend to neglect the empirical issue about the ways that diverse identities are actually managed. However, the notion that people have different identities raises the important question of how these identities are negotiated or dealt with. In addition, discussions about hybridity tend to be linked to youth cultures, urban centres in Western cities, and 'new ethnicities' (Back, 1996; Hall, 1990).

The present paper has examined some of the discursive devices used in narratives by members of a particular minority group for reconciling or accommodating their national, ethnic and religious identity. The situation of the Polish Tatars is an interesting case because of their long historical presence in Catholic Poland, together with their Oriental and Islamic background. Furthermore, for the Polish Tatars, being a Tatar, Muslim and Pole at the same time is not only possible, but central to their self-understanding (Warمیńska, 1997). Tatars constantly stress the integration of these aspects without limiting the importance of any of them.

By analysing articles in two Tatar magazines, two main strategies for combining or managing multiple identities were identified: one to identity definitions, and the other to identity connections. By focusing on different levels of reality, the former provides a complementary understanding of being a Tatar. There is a factual story, in which a local and historical connection is made, and a spiritual one, in which the belonging to an imagined symbolic community is stressed.

However, the Tatars are Muslims whereas Polish national identity is closely connected to being Catholic (Mach, 1993; Zamoyski, 1993). Hence, the Tatars' claim to Polishness can be problematic when their religious background is emphasised too much. It is difficult to find the right balance between being Polish and Muslim at the same time. The analysis indicates that there are discursive strategies that function to accommodate or reconcile the potential tensions. For example, the similarities and connections between Islam and Christianity were stressed. Also, the contribution made by Islamic culture to Polish culture was emphasised, and the Tatars tried to present themselves as being in a unique mediating position between Islam and Christianity. Hence, in the Polish Tatar magazines, various strategies were used in trying to manage the different identities in such a way that there is no internal contradiction between the ethnic, national and religious orientations.

By way of conclusion, we would like to consider two issues. The first concerns the question of generality and the approach we have taken, and the second relates to future developments. Firstly, there are several reasons for being careful about generalising the present results too widely. For example, there is the significance of the written material with its particular characteristics. The analysis does not address the lived reality of the community or the everyday identity negotiations with fellow Polish Tatars and various 'outsiders'. However, it should be noted that the present findings were quite similar to tendencies found in our field work, where, for example, people also tended to define their Polishness in historical, factual terms and their 'Tatariness' in a spiritual way. And we came across many examples where Islamic and Christian practices were combined and their similarities were emphasised. Furthermore, our interest in written, public material was deliberate because we noted that being a Pole and a Tatar at the same time was considered more problematic in a public rather than a more private context. Questions of hybridity are particularly significant in relation to identity claims that need to be recognised and validated by the wider society. In addition, the media is a powerful ideological institution that affects identities. However, it is clear that we were only able to discuss some of the



questions and issues related to hybridity and that there can be various other discursive strategies for reconciliation and combination. Empirical studies in different contexts and among various groups are needed in order to improve our understanding of the ways that multiple identities are managed and negotiated.

Secondly, identities are never finished and the Tatars' attempts at reconciliation and creating the idea of complementarity can be challenged by global and more local developments. For example, the recent increased global tensions and divergences between the Orient and the Occident may also force Polish Tatars to a position of having to make local choices of loyalty. Furthermore, the increased mobility of people can have an effect. The Tatars are not the only Muslims in Poland, as for several years students and immigrants, mostly of Arab countries, have been coming to Poland. These people have established new associations such as the Islamic Circle of Poland and the Muslim Students of Poland. These associations want to explain and introduce Islam to the Polish people, but they also want to reinforce the Islamic faith and practices in those who are already Muslims. The Polish Tatars in particular are considered to have a very limited and often inaccurate knowledge of Islam. The special local and cultural character given to Islam by the Polish Tatars is rejected by these new associations in favour of the 'real' Islam and the need for increased Islamic activity. This development may raise new questions and tensions for the way that the Polish Tatars understand and define themselves. The possibilities of being a Tartar, Muslim and Pole at the same time may change. Narrative opportunities and constraints are not fixed, particularly not for identities that are currently among the most contested, such as ethnicity, religion and nation. New developments can create new commonalities and discrepancies. This is also true for minority groups with a long historical and traditional role within a particular country, such as the Polish Tatars.

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